Lateral

Journal of the Cultural Studies Association

The Platform-Enabled Durability of Colonial Racial Capitalism in Washington DC's Wards 7 and 8

by Nina Medvedeva | Digital Platforms and Agency, Issue 14.2 (Fall 2025)

ABSTRACT This article explores how platforms reinforce structures of racism and coloniality in Washington DC's majority-Black Ward 7 and Ward 8. Drawing on ethnographic research with Black hosts who short-term rent on Airbnb, I follow how Black residents' imaginaries of space are superseded by platform-enabled white users' imaginaries through Airbnb's "Location" star ratings. This rating draws down hosts' overall ratings based on guests' racist experiences of feeling "unsafe" in majority-Black working-class neighborhoods—resulting in lower visibility on Airbnb's app, decreased bookings, and financial losses. Using a geopolitical conception of racism on platforms which I call the Colonial Racial Capitalist Stack (CRCStack), I show how these ratings enable platform-mediated conceptions of space and land that discursively reinforce racist depictions of Wards 7 and 8. I read Benjamin Bratton's design concept of "the Stack" through Ruha Benjamin's analytic of "discriminatory design" to argue that platforms are key sites for the exploitation and ongoing dispossession of land and labor under systems of racism, settler and franchise colonialisms, and capitalism across a variety of historical and geographical contexts, as described by Koshy, et. al. Through an exploration of the Stack's layers (User/Interface/Address, City/Cloud, and Earth), I argue that the CRCStack makes racism, as a social technology, more durable by entrenching as a racialized geopolitical ordering of the world into the life worlds of Black people living in Wards 7 and 8. Durability is a key metric by which platforms are measured. Platforms that are unable to cultivate durability—whether by cultivating a loyal user community, harnessing the network effect, or technological necessity—are quickly replaced by other platforms. Reading technology as a racializing and racialized tool helps us understand how racism, as a system, is innovated and entrenched through technological means. I demonstrate how platforms act as the latest technological innovation created to extend the durability of existing systems of racialization and colonization that are required for racial capitalist economies to function. I theorize how racism on the CRCStack operates at multiple overlapping layers, focusing specifically on how discrimination on Airbnb impacts users, neighborhoods, cities, and the wider real estate market. In doing so, I not only explore how platform-enabled racism restricts Black residents' spatial imaginaries but also trace how Black hosts push back against the CRCStack through Airbnb Support complaints, grassroots practices of negotiation with racist guests, and social

movement actions in conjunction with state authorities. I conclude by thinking through what dismantling the CRCStack would require for platform corporations like Airbnb, its users, and city residents.

KEYWORDS Airbnb, colonialism, platform studies, racial capitalism

Introduction

In 2016, Airbnb released a one-minute video profiling users who rented their homes in Washington DC's Wards 7 and 8. Airbnb created this video in response to a looming regulatory debate over whether short-term rental companies like it are beneficial to cities, or whether they are detrimental for taking away housing from long-term residents and promoting unregulated tourism. Airbnb collaborated with hosts to create video ads, news quotes, lobbying campaigns, grassroots canvasses, and rallies to fight back against regulations. Hosts in the aforementioned video were part of Airbnb Action, an advocacy group developed by Airbnb after advocacy by Airbnb hosts helped defeat a 2015 referendum regulating short-term rentals in San Francisco.[1] In lieu of regulations, Airbnb Action advocated for so-called "sensible regulations" that allow the corporation to self-regulate its user base along a proposed community compact.[2] While the corporation would provide the city with top-level data on its rentals, enforcement would be left to cities individually. Airbnb would have no legal obligation to remove illegal listings. Likewise, the number of units that could be rented by an individual host in cities would remain unchanged, though Airbnb promised to encourage the rental of "only permanent homes on a short-term basis" among its hosts.[3] Advocacy by Airbnb hosts like the ones in the video was pivotal in the regulatory debates across the United States.

The video's message was simple: Airbnb helps Black working-class residents supplement their income in an unaffordable city, promotes economic growth by sending tourists to local businesses, and empowers hosts to show their

neighborhood pride while saving for future priorities like marriage. Chekesha, a Black homeowner in Historic Anacostia, says, “When the economy crashed in 2008, you know, it devastated a lot of people.” Randy, a Black homeowner who owns a generational family home with his wife, explained that “Airbnb, at first, was a way out. I didn’t know exactly how I was going to keep this house. I’ve been here since I was four years old.” A title card then states that “48% of Airbnb hosts in Washington DC said they use the money they earn to help pay their rent or mortgage.” Synta, a Black homeowner in Lincoln Heights, talks about how Airbnb is “keeping people in their homes” while showing an “authentic part of the city. An authentic part of America.” A title card reads that “97% of the rental price goes directly to the Airbnb host.” Kanita, a Black small business owner, then explains that Airbnb has allowed her to pour her short-term rental money into her community and business. The video returns to Chekesha who says that Airbnb “allowed people to basically take control of their financial destiny.” A title card states, “As economic inequality grows, Airbnb helps Washington families earn a little extra money.” The video ends with Kanita and Randy enthusiastically praising Airbnb. Kanita calls Airbnb “really an amazing phenomenon” and Randy says that “the sharing economy is out of this world.”[4]

Airbnb hosts who rent out their home or a room in their house have long been subject to scrutiny by activists and scholars. Pro-regulation activists told me that hosts collaborated with Airbnb to create an inaccurate image of hosting as beneficial to cities. They charged Airbnb with facilitating displacement, higher rents, and neighborhood disorder. They saw host efforts as an attempt to cover up these impacts. Airbnb scholars have similarly scrutinized Airbnb hosts. Critics have explained that single-family homeowners are not representative of the short-term rental market.[5] Others argue that hosts parrot Airbnb-provided talking points and serve as corporate-supported front groups that provide cover for large-scale professional investors that constitute the bulk of Airbnb.[6]

This paper chooses to take Airbnb hosting on its face. Though Airbnb may have mobilized these hosts, it's undeniable that hosts advocated for fewer regulations of their own accord. Black hosts brought Airbnb guests into their neighborhoods because they believed it provided them and their neighbors with economic, social, and interpersonal benefits. This is no small matter. White residents have long portrayed DC's Wards 7 and 8 using racist imagery. Black residents of these Wards have pushed against these portrayals by showcasing their community and history. Hosts named fighting against this form of discriminatory space-making through the creation of a curated tourist experience as one of the benefits of Airbnb.

Surprisingly, many of the hosts advocating against regulations had to fight anti-Black racism on Airbnb. Hosts told me about how primarily white guests expressed their bias against the predominantly Black, working-class area through in-app ratings. Airbnb is one of the many platform corporations that use star ratings to rate interactions between users. Ratings are determined through a mix of qualitative measures including listing accuracy, host communication, and cleanliness. Airbnb hosts rely on their positive ratings to gain the trust of prospective guests and earn an income. The experiences of Black hosts in Ward 7 and Ward 8, and research on Black hosting more broadly, emphasize the impact of racist negative star ratings through lost revenue and lowered search prominence on the platform.[7] Hosts also told me that these ratings diminished the sense of place, reproducing anti-Black spatial imaginaries of Wards 7 and 8.

This paper attempts to hold these multiple forms of meaning-making behind Airbnb hosting in tandem: its potential for displacement and its resistance against racist placemaking. I argue that these hosting impacts are interlocked. Drawing on Benjamin Bratton's conception of the Stack, I demonstrate how platform infrastructures facilitate these contradictory effects. The Stack enables us to see how platforms operate along six layers: User, Infrastructure, Address, City, Cloud, and Earth. While I hold onto Bratton's blueprint for the Stack, I expand it through

Neda Atanasoski and Kalindi Vora's conception of technoliberalism to think through how platforms increase the durability of racial, colonial, and capitalist relations to land, labor, and people. I argue that attuning to the platform infrastructures of colonial racial capitalism enables us to make sense of seemingly contradictory impacts (e.g., using Airbnb to stay vs Airbnb activism displacing people) through their connection to extractive and death-dealing systems. The disparate impacts caused by Airbnb hosts are then an infrastructurally facilitated outcome enabled by the colonial racial capitalist Stack. In making this argument, I do not wish to point the finger at any of my participants for being a "bad host" or a "good host." Rather, I want to think about how platform-enabled activism and actions are tied to systems beyond our control—ones we must reckon with to pursue liberatory outcomes.

This paper unfolds across five sections. After discussing my ethnographic methodology, I trace how Ward 7 and 8 hosts must feed their visions of space through platform infrastructures that may make colonial racial capitalism more durable. I first discuss my conceptualization of platforms and colonial racial capitalism. I explain the role of agency on platforms and how actions on platforms may have unintended consequences due to the platform's infrastructure. I then move on to two examples grounded in my ethnographic fieldwork with Airbnb hosts in Washington DC: racist Airbnb ratings and the platform-enabled side-effects of pro-Airbnb advocacy. The former is grounded in the User/Interface/Address layers of the Stack while the latter explores the City/Cloud/Earth layers. I demonstrate how turning to the colonial racial capitalist Stack allows us to see these differential impacts as interlocking effects of its infrastructure. I conclude with a brief discussion of what it might look like to make colonial racial capitalism less durable.

Methodology

This article draws on my ethnographic fieldwork on the 2018 to 2020 Airbnb regulatory debate in Washington DC During this time, I spoke with eight Airbnb hosts (four of whom lived in Wards 7 and 8), six labor representatives, one business association civic group leader, and two government officials to better understand the state of the regulatory debate in the District. I draw on archival research of legislative debates, newspaper accounts, radio debates, analyses of the DC short-term rental market, political ads, and advocacy promotional material. These archival materials help me contextualize my interviews within the wider short-term rental debate. The triangulation of ethnographic interviews, media analysis, and participant observation allowed me to trace the work of platforms within Wards 7 and 8 and the District more broadly.

In triangulating this research, I pursued Michael Burawoy's extended case study method. Burawoy explains that ethnography can be a reflexive science that "starts out from dialogue… between observer and participants, embeds such dialogue within a second dialogue between local processes and extralocal forces that in turn can only be comprehended through a third, expanding dialogue of theory with itself."[8] I follow his insight that theory "guides intervention, it constitutes situated knowledges into social processes, and it locates processes within their wider context of determination" within and beyond the academy.[9] In taking this approach, I mirror the platform logics that I seek to trace: ones that enable local actors to embed within larger platform networks that cross city, state, and national boundaries.

Urban Platforms and Colonial Racial Capitalist Durability

Airbnb's Platform Sovereignty and the Stack

Bratton's conceptualization of the Stack helps illuminate how Airbnb co-produces contradictory effects through its platform infrastructure. Airbnb provides an online platform that allows guest users to rent a dwelling from a host user. According to Bratton, the platform is "a standards-based technical-economic system that simultaneously distributes interfaces through their remote coordination and centralizes their integrated control through the same coordination."[10] Platforms do so by creating generative mechanisms "that set the terms of participation according to fixed protocols" and expand in size by creating a structure for unplanned interactions among users and these interfaces.[11] Platforms generate user identities, develop systems to manage data and enable digital emergence, and govern users through platform protocols and standards.[12] In Airbnb's case, the platform enables host users to rent out their whole home, a private room, or a shared space for a limited time to a guest user. At the time of writing, Airbnb and other short-term rental platforms do not set a formal limit on how long a guest can rent a space from a host in the US, though hosts are limited to only one listing at a time and a set number of days in some jurisdictions. Platforms profit from collecting data on users and by taking a small cut of the rent paid by guests to hosts in Airbnb's case.[13]

Bratton traces how platforms function geopolitically by proposing six layers that platforms employ—The User, The Interface, The Address, the City, the Cloud, and the Earth. Bratton argues that these layers make up the Stack—a not-yet-existing platform of platforms that encompasses all the existing platforms in our world as a boundary-breaking cross-geographical political system. While the Stack may be hypothetical, the way its layers interlock proves useful for conceptualizing how

platforms interact with one another to shape space. The User—whether human, machine, or animal—uses the Interface to interact with the platform. The Interface can be a smartphone app, application program interface (API), or even another platform. The platform gives the various User and Interface components unique Addresses that allow them to be cataloged and sorted. Platforms can plot these Addresses in urban space (the City layer) and extend certain privileges and differential levels of access to these Addresses. These data are stored in the Cloud layer which is cross-territorial as an accessible set of resources but also grounded in concrete space such as server farms, cell phone towers, and internet cables. Platforms are powered by manipulating the Earth layer—the raw materials that must be extracted and used for platforms to function.[14]

Bratton conceptualizes the multiple platforms that make up the Stack as a third institutional form independent from the state and the market. Bratton argues that Westphalian nation-states are defined by their ability to enforce territorial and governance claims over space—be it land, air space, or electromagnetic spectrum.[15] The Stack's platforms diverge from the nation-state in that they "centralize (like states), scaffolding the terms of participation according to rigid but universal protocols, even as they decentralize (like markets), coordinating economies not through the superimposition of fixed plans but through interoperable and emergent interaction."[16] Platforms exercise a unique kind of platform sovereignty: "the still immature combination of legally articulated political subjectivities and an infrastructurally determined sovereignty produced in relation to the platform infrastructures."[17]

As Doorn argues, this kind of sovereignty extends into urban space by "leveraging proprietary urban data and information asymmetries" to exercise infrastructural powers over areas such as housing and tourism that were "traditionally governed by state actors."[18] Projects like Airbnb Citizen and Host Clubs facilitate the creation of a regulatory entrepreneur who is both operating in their own right and in conjunction with a platform. From the view of the host, Airbnb acts as an

infrastructural connector between many independent hosts. In Doorn's view, hosts are incentivized by Airbnb's rhetoric and organizing efforts to see themselves as Foucauldian market subjects—neither fully private nor public—that argue that they can better govern themselves than any government. This politicized hosting is a form of platform sovereignty that shifts the ground for how politics are done in the city by allowing platforms to set the conditions for how hosts connect and mobilize politically.

Platforms are not completely sovereign sites as they regularly interface with the state. For example, states can impose rules on platforms and ensure they follow these rules or get levied with a fine, as in the case of the European Union Internet Standard. Likewise, Airbnb defers to municipal and national laws. Airbnb has no interest in skirting Chinese data reporting laws and risk being banned in the country. However, Airbnb does exercise limited sovereignty over its platform: it governs its users through policies and guidelines, creates and mobilizes publics to advocate on behalf of its interest, and takes part in urbanization efforts, whether legal or not, that enables the platform's continual expansion. Aihwa Ong argues that sovereignty is the "outcome of various administrative strategies that seek to improve the economic and political well-being of the nation."[19] Though Ong's analysis is state-centered, the attention to how various actors, rather than one overarching sovereign, implement administrative strategies to produce a governance outcome is helpful for analyzing how platforms exercise governance. If we understand Airbnb to be an actor exercising certain administrative tools for a given political economic end, it engages in a limited type of platform-enabled sovereignty.

Airbnb is one of many actors competing for its administrative strategies to gain hold in an urban context. These different actors and forces vie to "install dominant hegemonic alliances" between "different segments of nation states and different social actors."[20] The state attempts to create a container to resolve and delimit these administrative conflicts through courts, legislatures, and enforcement, but it

is far from total in its reach. In the case of Airbnb regulations, Airbnb and its hosts must contend with the activist forces that try to curtail their business through the legislature. Airbnb, and the Stack more broadly, develops in negotiation with these existing regimes of state governance.

The Stack Under Colonial Racial Capitalism

Bratton's conceptualization of the Stack is a provocative theorization of how platforms function geospatially. However, this theorization remains disconnected from the conditions of colonial racial capitalism—a disconnect that makes it difficult to analyze the experiences of Wards 7 and 8 Airbnb hosts. To take one example, Bratton envisions a future where planetary-level computation overcomes the human ability to regulate the Stack. Bratton quotes Eliezer Yudkowsky to motivate the political consequences of this future: "The AI does not hate you, nor does it love you, but you are made out of atoms which it can use for something else."[21] In Bratton's vision of a Stack-To-Come, the attention of the Stack shifts away from humans toward non-human users. While Bratton envisions a role for "a certain humanism and companion figure of humanity," he calls on us to abandon anthropocentricism to focus on the political possibilities of planetary-scale computation that privileges non-humans.[22]

This vision of a post-human world divided into laboring machines and obsolete humans falls prey to what Atanasoski and Vora critique as technoliberalism: "the political alibi of present-day racial capitalism that posits humanity as an aspirational figuration in relation to technological transformation, obscuring the uneven racial and gendered relations of labor, power, and social relations that underlie the contemporary conditions of capitalist production."[23]

Bratton's invocation of a singular undifferentiated humanity is rooted in technoliberalism. The "feeling human" made possible through the Stack-to-Come fails to pay "attention to the composition of the human as an abstract category whose expansive capacities continually reaffirm the racial order of things that undergirds Euro-American modernity."[24] This imaginary does not unpack the racialized hierarchies of "Man" inherent to its workings.[25] Sylvia Wynter explains that knowledge systems enable people to understand who they are through different genres of being human. The dominant Western-European modes of humanity (e.g., Wynter's Christian Man, Man 1, Man 2) justify racism through a variety of knowledge systems—ranging from biblical to evolutionary—that elevate certain segments of humanity (e.g., white, Western, bourgeois) while punishing or eradicating others (e.g., Black, Indigenous, colonized).[26] The technoliberal Stack risks replicating these racist modes of humanity in its conception of technological systems by leaving the material conditions of racism and colonialism unexamined.

An analysis of the Stack does not have to reproduce this technoliberalism. Drawing on Atanasoski and Vora's provocation, I argue that we should understand the Stack as a geopolitical infrastructure that reinforces colonial racial capitalism: the exploitation and ongoing dispossession of land and labor under "racism, settler and franchise colonialisms, and capitalism across a variety of historical and geographical contexts."[27] The Stack's infrastructure enables historically and geographically specific forms of colonial racial capitalism through its exercises of platform sovereignty.

My conception of the Colonial Racial Capitalist Stack (CRC Stack) draws on Bratton's design brief for how platforms function geospatially and theorizes them alongside colonial racial capitalism. I analyze how the material conditions of racialization, colonialism, and capitalism are reinforced through the Stack. Though I focus on Airbnb, this valuation exists across the Stack: in the data sets platform algorithms train on and in the way technological systems discriminate against racialized and impoverished users.[28]

The state and the market, already embedded within and reproductive of colonial racial capitalism, gave birth to the CRC Stack. The CRC Stack arose to take advantage of state and corporate policies that led to the 2008 financial collapse, allowing capital to continue to flow. Post-2008 quantitative easing policies, low interest rates, high levels of corporate savings, and mass unemployment created the perfect monetary environment for platform corporations to emerge as investors had to turn to increasingly risky investments for high-yield profits.[29] Technology became a key site for investment. Driven by venture capital, platform companies like Uber, Airbnb, and Doordash quickly swept the nation. An unprecedented number of precarious homeowners and renters accompanied this investment environment. This precariat was desperate to find work to hold onto their home. Enter Airbnb—a platform that enabled its users to generate hundreds of dollars in just a few nights on their own terms and schedules. In 2009, Airbnb was still a small start-up at the Y Combinator Startup School. Airbnb's co-founders would travel to New York City, Washington DC, and anywhere else they had users to coach them on how to list their space on Airbnb, take professional photographs for users, and get user feedback on the site designs.[30] This initial network building quickly ballooned after Airbnb secured venture funding. By 2011, the company was valued between $7.8 million and $1.2 billion and claimed 140 million guest arrivals.[31] Racialized communities that were hardest hit by the financial collapse, such as Black working-class hosts in Wards 7 and 8, had the most to gain and lose through their Airbnb business.

The overlap of colonial racial capitalism and the Stack underscores a relationship of durability created in this new institutional form. McIntyre, Srinivasan, and Chintakananda suggest that more durable platforms create strong ties among users, make the platform a necessity of daily life, and leverage cross-platform benefits.[32] Platforms that are unable to cultivate durability are replaced by more durable platforms. Colonial racial capitalism, as a structure ordering our world, is similarly made durable through technological means. The CRC Stack functions at all layers to reproduce this racialized grammar of humanity through systems of

labor exploitation, racialization, and resource extraction. Jodi Melamed has argued that state regimes employ "official anti-racisms" to discursively justify the inherent racial dispossession at the heart of racial capitalist economies.[33] Similarly, platforms employ discourses of empowerment alongside infrastructural mechanisms and technologies to instantiate a given world and make it durable. The CRC Stack acts as a container of the technological, discursive, and infrastructural techniques that continue racial capitalism. The relations aren't necessarily novel in their content as they are in their delivery: in their distribution of profits, goods, and services.

Analyzing the CRC Stack helps unpack a new terrain of action in the ongoing fight against racial capitalism. This terrain is thorny as platforms co-enable displacement and resistance by users and those outside the platform. Beth Coleman states that agency is "how one might understand oneself as an actor in an environment and how one's effects on that environment might be gauged."[34] Working within the confines of the platform, we see what Iris Lopez (2008) calls the tension between agency and the constraints put upon agency by socio-economic systems.[35] Studying the lives of Puerto Rican women in New York City who underwent *la operacion*, Iris Lopez presents a myriad of factors that shape the kinds of choices available to these women: a lack of affordable healthcare, cultural normalization of *la operacion* as a form of birth control, limited reproductive education, familial pressures, and poverty. Lopez argues that these women cannot exercise optimal agency, but still make agential choices within systemic constraints. Similarly, we see users on platforms making choices constrained by platform policies, socioeconomic conditions of housing, histories of urban inequality, and market forces pressuring people to short-term rent.

Within these constraints, there are acts of agency that are resistant to the conditions that enable the CRC Stack. But some agential choices strengthen them. Saba Mahmood argues that agency includes "the variety of ways in which norms are lived and inhabited, aspired to, reached for, and consummated."[36]

Likewise, agency extends beyond what is directly intended by the individual actors. While individuals may make a specific choice on a platform, its effects may exceed what they had intended. In Coleman's terms, an action's effects on the environment may outstrip the actor's intent. Judith Butler calls this the "perlocutionary" (the effect that an act has) rather than the "illocutionary" (what is meant by an act) force of discursive acts.[37] Agential choices are not only about resistance but also about how norms are reinstated by those operating within them. Given that platforms operate as an organizing infrastructure that enhances the durability of racial capitalism, we should read user agency as an uneasy navigation of illocutionary actions and their perlocutionary force.

In the next two sections, I follow user agency on platforms across the Stack's layers. I begin with the User and Interface layers in Washington DC's Wards 7 and 8 to trace how Black hosts organize within and outside platform-mediated connections to push back against Airbnb-enabled racism. I highlight how users engage in resistive action against the platform-enabled processes that make racist devaluation of space more durable. Then, I shift from these resistive actions to analyze how these same hosts bolster the platform-enabled racist durability on the City, Cloud, and Earth layers of Airbnb. I focus on how the illocutionary and perlocutionary effects of hosting activism diverge through the platform's embeddedness in the colonial racial capitalist processes of extraction.

Fighting Racist Airbnb Ratings in Washington DC's Wards 7 and 8

Washington DC's 7th and 8th Wards are located across the Anacostia River ("East of the River"), a major tributary of the Potomac River Basin. Originally the land of the Nacotchtank, the area has become home to historical and contemporary Black working-class life in the nation's capital. White settlers drove the Nacotchtank from their land and settled what would become present-day

Anacostia in the 1770s. In the 1800s, Anacostia grew as a settlement for free Black people. Anacostia grew in prosperity through the early and mid-1900s. After the 1968 riots, the area saw white flight and a move of Black professionals into the suburbs—creating a reduction in resources and government investment that would impact the neighborhood for decades to come.[38] According to the DC Policy Center, these wards experience persistent poor health, high rates of poverty, low educational attainment, and high rates of incarceration.[39] These inequities are due to decades of job and housing discrimination, a powerful carceral apparatus in the Wards, government disinvestment, and urban development policies that prioritize high-income residents and displace DC's Black working-class.[40] Yet, despite these disparities, residents in Wards 7 and 8 take pride in their neighborhoods. Black residents emphasize the community's beauty, close-knit neighborhood ties, the area's historical importance, and their success in the face of hardship.[41] Black Washingtonians proudly worked to stake their claim in Anacostia as a Black neighborhood where their voices matter.[42]

Airbnb allows Black hosts to showcase this neighborhood pride while receiving much-needed additional income to address rising costs of living. According to data from the short-term rental analytics website AirDNA, Airbnb stays in Wards 7 and 8 made up 7% of total active listings in DC in 2021. These listings generated $3.75 million in extra income for residents between June 1, 2017, and May 31, 2018, or about $4,712 a year per host.[43] The hosts I spoke to said that these visits were an important injection of tourism dollars into an area that otherwise has no hotel industry. This money was important for hosts in the face of rising rents and cost of living.

Importantly, Airbnb allowed hosts to combat the negative impacts of businesses that did not travel to their part of the District. Hosts told me of taxicab drivers and rideshare workers who refused to travel to Anacostia. Two large-scale short-term rental property managers I spoke to explained that they didn't do business east of the river with vague allusions to it being a "difficult market." Black Airbnb hosts

and their non-Black neighbors believed they were counteracting these forms of racial bias against their Ward by bringing in tourists from across the world to experience Anacostia.

Hosts' efforts to promote Wards 7 and 8 ran against the aesthetic, labor, and customer-focused regimes promoted by Airbnb. The ideal Airbnb home must conform to certain trends of cleanliness, aspirational living, and homeliness. Airbnb hosts are taught to labor within the domestic space in a way that reflects an entrepreneurial but caring ethos, what Bialski calls "the ideological and aesthetic regime of how to be a host, how to create and 'market' one's home, and in what way to interact with one's guest."[44] The aesthetic regime reflects neoliberal gentrified aesthetics through what Kyle Chayka calls AirSpace: the homogenized aesthetic of Airbnb that is meant to make travel between different listings frictionless.[45] One need only look at Airbnb's recent campaign "Strangers Aren't Strange" to see the vision of a home unmarked by past travelers, furnished with minimalist upscale furniture, and populated with clean and well-lit spaces.[46] These idealized aesthetics span beyond the individual home as the datafication of the interior hooks Airbnb into extractive circuits that mirror other gentrified aesthetics in global urbanism.[47]

Airbnb's ideal aesthetic is a by-product of gentrification driven by a "racialized process of class change."[48] Gentrified aesthetics express a post-displacement ideal of the domestic that is difficult, if not impossible, to attain in an actively gentrifying neighborhood. Even if the interior of a rental matches the AirSpace ideal, its location throws the incongruity between ideal and reality into sharp relief. Though some guests may find the break from AirSpace appealing, the Airbnb platform enables users to punish hosts for failing to meet this ideal through regulatory mechanisms. In Bratton's terms, Airbnb disciplined User identities through an Interface that promoted specific aesthetics and forms of labor to surface these Users in Interface searches—a disciplining procedure rooted in racial capitalist evaluations of space and place.

Airbnb couples the imagery and labor of hosting with regulatory market processes to assure user trust. The corporation has enlisted predictive algorithms and machine learning to create risk scores for Airbnb listings, checked users against regulatory, terrorist, and sanctions watchlists, conducted background checks, and created secure payment mechanisms on its app and website. This regime is supplemented by measures such as star ratings, Codes of Conduct, and training on how to be a good host—what Roelofsen and Minca call the biopolitical measures of the digitized self.[49] Airbnb exercised biopolitics in two ways: as "a disciplinary power, aimed at the individual (host and/or guest); and a regulatory power, aimed at the level of the community (of Airbnb citizens)."[50] Hosts who come to embody Airbnb's idealized self, as discussed in the seven categories of star ratings below, are elevated to higher status in the Airbnb marketplace—appearing more frequently in searches and bearing the marker of reliability through high star ratings and the "Superhost" status given to high-ranking host. It is through these star ratings that racist evaluations and failures to match the AirSpace ideal become biopolitically salient.

Airbnb's star ratings enable Users to rate their rental experience on a scale of zero to five. These ratings supplement written reviews and allow guests to have an additional avenue of feedback around seven factors: overall experience, cleanliness, listing accuracy, host communication, listing accuracy and value, the kinds of amenities provided, and location. While all ratings attempt to craft an objective marker out of a user's subjective experience, the Location rating is perhaps the vaguest of the ratings: "Was the guest made aware of safety, transportation, points of interest, and special considerations like noise or other situations that might affect their stay?"[51]

The flexibility of what counts as "safety" allows racist prejudices to cloud the star rating and written reviews. As one Black host plainly put it, "You can fix cleanliness, you can fix accuracy, value. Location's static." She told me the story of a friend "who had a guest that complained about a Black man being in her front

yard, that he posed a danger. He was [my friend's] husband landscaping her own yard. The guest left a bad review." While hosts were quick to note this was not the case with all their stays, the platform's location ratings enabled guests to impose their biases against Black hosts and the area. This mirrors gentrified reconstitutions of urban space through what Kent-Stoll calls "the spatial reproduction of white colonial desire and consumption facilitated by the racialized physical, cultural, and political displacement of Black, Indigenous, Asian, Latinx, and working-class people."[52] By being subjected to the white and middle-class standards of AirSpace, Black hosts and their neighbors face physical, cultural, and political erasure, if not temporary displacement as in the case of Black hosts who had to leave their homes to ensure guests did not lower their ratings.

The effects of anti-Black racism against the Wards affected non-Black neighbors' rentals as well. Jasmine, a young Black host, told me a story about her friend Sophie, a white host in the area. She explained that a white woman booked a stay at Sophie's home. Sophie, who didn't put her picture on her profile, received a message from the guest after she arrived in downtown historic Anacostia. The guest said, "I don't feel safe here as a white woman." Sophie quickly called her out on her racism, "Oh that's interesting because I'm a white woman and I felt perfectly fine here." Jasmine explained, "You kind of have to leverage who you are to call people out on their nonsense." In this case, because she canceled the guests' stay, Sophie did not receive a lower star rating, but she did have to provide a full refund.

Not all guests were openly racist. One Black woman host joked that some guests walked around with an "'I feel bad, but I'm really afraid of Black people' look on their face." This host explained that she could clearly see guests with a bias against Black neighborhoods and herself as a Black host. But these guests attempted to disguise these racial biases by giving hosts negative ratings on "race-neutral" factors such as "cleanliness, they'll complain about loitering, they'll complain about nothing—and then will admit nothing happened to them." These

guests used race-neutral language that would not trigger Airbnb's anti-discrimination enforcement efforts but nevertheless enable them to express their anti-Blackness.

In the estimation of the hosts I spoke with, anti-discrimination efforts on Airbnb defined racism as an outright statement of discrimination (e.g., "I hate x group of people" or a slur) and ignored the more nuanced ways racism affected them. For example, Anita, a younger Black host, told me about how her brother hosted a tall white man who had come to the District for a Congressional internship. The guest's parents had booked the stay and gave her brother a low rating. When her brother asked why they gave a low location rating despite all the proper information being in the listing, the parents explained that the intern had checked the location on his phone, and it said Anacostia. After he went to his internship, his white co-workers told him the area was unsafe. Anita expressed frustration over this experience, "As opposed to saying or refuting it, he just doubled down. That at times he felt unsafe. But it's just sort of like, you felt unsafe, but, when you looked around you, all you saw were Black people who were working-class. So, what's that say about you?"

The parents tried to deflect the charge of racism by saying that they lived in a majority Black city. Anita replied with a laugh, "I'm sure you live in the majority-white side. I have this problem with people here, and the city is still 65 percent African-American. Just because they live in DC doesn't mean they're any less racist. Trump lives here, that has not improved him." In this case, Airbnb did not treat the lower rating as an instance of racial discrimination even as it actively expressed racist views, unveiling a platform-level governance decision that embedded racism into its modes of evaluation.

Platforms also created an Interface-level consequence for negative ratings. Many Airbnb hosts in Ward 7 and Ward 8 relied on the status of Superhost, which marked hosts as reputable vendors, moved them up in searches, and allowed

them to charge more for their listings. Superhost status allowed hosts to compete with nearby tourist havens, where, as Jasmine put it, "from the algorithm's perspective, it pushes you up because obviously they want to put hosts that have [the business] down up. Hosts in an area like Foggy Bottom don't care because they know people just want [to be there], they'll book no matter what." Low location ratings and subsequent lower overall ratings threatened hosts' ability to maintain Superhost status—which requires an overall rating of 4.8 out of 5.[53] A lowered rating and the loss of the Superhost status pushed hosts to lower their prices and made it harder to compete with Superhosts who do not get marked down due to racial bias. Thinking through the User/Interface layers of the Stack, we see here how guest Users' actions can punish hosts for living in majority-Black neighborhoods.

Second, the lower rating impacts how Ward 7 and 8 hosts show up in searches on the Airbnb app and website, the Interface layer of the Stack. At the time of writing, upon searching Airbnb for Superhost listings or all listings in Washington DC, nothing pops up in these Wards. Users must manually zoom into the area to see any listings. Ward 7 and Ward 8 hosts had to compete with hosts in whiter and wealthier areas by lowering their prices and doing extra legwork to maintain a Superhost status. By relying on star ratings, Airbnb created a system where hosts in majority-Black areas were systematically excluded from general searches but also created an interface where bias had an undue impact on how listings were shown.

In addition to the interpersonal and economic consequences, racist location ratings actively reinforced historical anti-Black stereotypes of the area as riddled with crimes and unsafe for visitors. These ratings fostered a platform-mediated white spatial imaginary over and above Black conceptions of these Wards. Lipsitz argues that "a white spatial imaginary based on exclusivity and augmented exchange value forms the foundational logic behind prevailing spatial and social politics in cities today . . . the white spatial imaginary idealizes 'pure'

homogeneous spaces, controlled environments, and predictable patterns of design and behavior. It seeks to hide social problems rather than solve them."[54] We can see the white spatial imaginary present in guest descriptions of fear over Black wards and scruples with insignificant details in the listing.

The platform in this instance works as an infrastructural means to reinscribe white narratives of Wards 7 and 8 above those of residents living there. Airbnb depends on users' perceptions of space to function as a tourist platform. These anti-Black processes of interpretation and divestment are systematized through the platform's star rating systems. The durability of colonial racial capitalism is enhanced through a hardening of anti-Black spatializations of land and labor. By reinforcing white fears of Black people and places and allowing for colorblind racism that does not explicitly name racial prejudice, Airbnb's platform abates dominant trends in urban development that devalue and incentivize the displacement of Black life in these words.

These struggles over space were not one-sided. While white Americans structurally excluded and physically displaced people of color into "ghettos, barrios, and reservations," Lipsitz argues that these groups "have turned segregation into congregation through social movements that depict space as valuable and finite, as a public resource for which all must take responsibility."[55] Echoing other studies of Black residents in Anacostia, Black Airbnb users and their non-Black neighbors engaged in resistive work both on the platform itself and within Airbnb host groups dedicated to serving communities in Anacostia. The platform infrastructure that enabled guests to discriminate against Black spaces also enabled hosts to congregate, confront guests directly, petition Airbnb to make changes, and collaborate to call on the DC government to fight for their rights. As part of its efforts to establish host clubs, Airbnb brought hosts together through in-person events and online forums. This enabled hosts to meet one another, form connections, and collaborate. Airbnb's rating system also led to hosts forming independent support groups where they worked together to figure

out how to optimize their rankings. This in turn led them to political consciousness and action.

Hosts worked to document and directly confront racial bias via the platform's suggested policies for welcoming and communicating with guests. Anita told me how she encouraged all hosts to use Airbnb's in-app messaging because, for all Airbnb knows, "you're just having a conflict, there's nothing in their communications referencing the things that are happening." Mirroring her friend Sophie's strategy above, Jasmine preemptively addressed anti-Black concerns about safety and crime: "I literally printed out the crime stats and I have it in my welcome binder." Jasmine told me that Airbnb only seemed to "remove reviews only if race is explicitly mentioned and I have had people leave reviews that were like, 'You will be the only white person.'"

For guests who were savvier in framing their racism in "race-neutral" terms, Jasmine explained that she had to "draw it out in your communications with them and have records of it to show that it was in fact about the discrimination because sometimes you just don't know. But you just know from your life experiences but that's not enough to meet any kind of standard." In these instances, Anita, Jasmine, and Sophie all addressed anti-Black bias in host communications, but also ensured that all guest-host messages stayed on the Airbnb app so they could make a compelling case for racial discrimination in ratings—a competing use of the Airbnb Interface against anti-Black guest users.

Outside of the app, hosts collaborated by forming networks through in-person group meetings and Facebook groups for DC Airbnb hosts. One Black host characterized the Facebook group as "mean girls" due to the venting of hosts about their guests and the Airbnb platform. These various networks enabled hosts to discuss best practices for screening guests, how to manage negative reviews, and how to ensure that guests do not "have a hidden bias problem or an issue . . . with being around people of color or being with the working poor." The

congregation of hosts enabled them to meet other hosts like them face-to-face and to collaborate against racist conceptions of space outside of the platform's infrastructure.

These groups acted outside the confines of the Airbnb app and the corporation's political ambitions. An independent group of Ward 7 and 8 hosts lobbied the DC Attorney General Karl A. Racine to draft a letter to Airbnb about the racialized impacts of location ratings, requesting a change to the system. Jennifer**,** a senior Black host in Ward 7, explained that even though she herself had never received anti-Black reviews, she wanted to act in solidarity with other hosts who experienced racism:

> I wanted to join them because I might get that. I wanted to be with my group, and we went to the office of the Attorney General and explained to him that there was no valid reason based on crime stats that a guest could say [they felt unsafe]. They were using their emotions and other reasons to lower that particular score. And we asked for his assistance in communicating with Airbnb to let Airbnb know that when you see these coded words in reviews, to do more investigating. To just look at the coded language of "I felt unsafe" or words like that that have other meanings in predominantly Black neighborhoods.

Jennifer acted in solidarity with her fellow hosts because racist guests devalued Black neighborhoods and hurt the hosts' business by using coded racial terms. Jennifer could see herself at the receiving end of such treatment. Importantly, Jennifer and her fellow hosts went directly to a state regulator, moving beyond Airbnb's platform affordances for self-regulation and remediation. This move illustrates the Stack's interrelation with state forms of regulation as well as how users are never fully captured within a platform's governance project.

In this section, I have explored how hosts are impacted by racist star ratings, work to maintain a Black spatial imaginary, and contest the durability of colonial racial capitalism within the confines of Airbnb's platforms and outside of it. Next, I move

from resistance to racist aggression and turn toward the conditions that make Airbnb hosting possible: the regulatory landscape and the City, Cloud, and Earth layers. I point to the platform's relation to gentrification, the global financial market, and resource extraction across the City, Cloud, and Earth layers of the Stack. I show how colonial racial capitalism undergirds even exemplary forms of anti-racist placemaking on Airbnb. Fully contending with racism on Airbnb means reckoning with the larger-scale effects that extend beyond the host-level impact of a racist user review. This is not to villainize Airbnb hosts and their struggles, but instead to think through what a wider anti-racist politics aimed at platforms might entail.

Enabling Colonial Racial Capitalist Durability Across Scales

Beyond individual Users and their interactions with the Interface and Address layers, we reach the City, the Cloud, and the Earth layers that sustain them. The City layer takes all individual User addresses and maps them across a given urban area, an operation made possible by the computing power of the Cloud. Airbnb, since its inception, has depended on Amazon Web Services (AWS) products to manage its app and user database—whether using over a thousand Amazon Elastic Compute Cloud instances to run its applications and distribute user traffic, analyzing fifty gigabytes of daily data through Amazon Elastic MapReduce, managing fifty terabytes of user photos, automating its data management, or creating the platform's API. AWS has allowed Airbnb to dedicate a single five-person operations team to manage these data while using its engineering capacity to better improve its services.[56]

In conjunction with AWS, Airbnb created a large-scale map of listings, users, and prices across a given city. Access to the information on this City layer, provided to users through Airbnb's API, enables professionalized landlords and investors to

take advantage of this information to buy property, set high prices, and create so-called "buy-to-let" investments. Research on Airbnb in Europe and the United States underscores the emergence of a consolidated professionalized short-term rental marketplace made of these investors and corporate landlords.[57] Even among the "actual people" on Airbnb there is an increasing push to professionalize through programs such as Airbnb's Cohost, Superhost, and Plus programs.[58] This group of landlords and investors partner to maximize the profit they can earn in a city, sometimes even going as far as to evict long-term tenants and flip their apartments into Airbnb rentals.

At the city level, we can begin to think about platform governance on a larger scale. While Ward 7 and Ward 8 may seem distinct from the other Wards in the District, platforms, investors, landlords, and individual hosts across different Wards formed a coalition to advocate for Airbnb's corporate self-governance and minimal legislative regulations (e.g., "sensible regulations"). Advocacy by smaller hosts buoyed the efforts of the coalition. The larger-scale property managers and multi-unit hosts needed the testimony of hosts in Ward 7 and 8 to argue that short-term renting helps make the city affordable, all the while profiting from potential displacement in other parts of the city. While Ward 7 and Ward 8 may not have the majority of Airbnb listings nor necessarily be sites of Airbnb-led displacement, we can see the precarity of Ward 7 and 8 hosts used by the coalition to argue for laissez-faire regulations.

The Ward 7 and 8 hosts arguing for their self-interest are not victims of false consciousness. Their legislative testimony and political lobbying were directed towards helping Ward 7 and 8 hosts use Airbnb with minimal regulations, but the illocutionary effect (what they advocated for) and the perlocutionary effect (what their statements were used to do) changed within the coalition's legislative advocacy. The City layer enables us to see this coalition as an instance where the death-dealing abstractions and hierarchical divisions of racial capitalism create

the conditions where the relief of one group's suffering also leads to that suffering in other parts of the City layer.

Beyond host advocacy, Airbnb in Wards 7 and 8 acts as an incipient form of gentrification. Fields and Raymond show that financialization "combines finance, data, and digital technology with racial hierarchies" to abstract geographic specificities through quantitative methods while reinscribing "hierarchies of death-dealing racial difference."[59] Airbnb provides yet another data flow for large-scale digital landlords seeking to profit at the expense of racialized populations. Cowen and Lewis draw our attention to how the disinvestment of Black urban spaces through redlining and other practices created the conditions for gentrification.[60] Situating these trends on a structural level, Wang argues that Black racialization is shaped "by way of a logic of disposability *and* a logic of exploitability."[61] Gentrification and policing (as disposability) and the subprime mortgage crisis, rising rents, and money to the carceral apparatus (as exploitability) are both standout structural features of the city, as well as foundational conditions for platforms and hosting.

Airbnb's City and Cloud layers function as a potential minefield of data both in response to and as part of the process of gentrification. What single homeowner hosts may use to stay in the area, larger scale hosts may use to displace long-term residents and tenants for short-term rental guests. Even so, single homeowners should not be shielded from their involvement in these platform entanglements. Gentrification is facilitated by optical processes that shape a space in particular class and race directions. Platforms, much like public space, murals, and architectural design, serve as one avenue where gentrification "is socially constructed by capital, state policy, media images, and consumers' tastes."[62] While preserving Black imaginaries of space through tourism may be worthwhile, it bears asking: whose Black imaginaries are preserved and in what ways? In her study of gentrification in DC's H Street/Atlas District neighborhood, Brandi Thompson Summers argues, "diversity—a color-conscious racial construct

that might otherwise deter white residents and patrons—now becomes a cherished asset, because of diversity's shift from a social justice ethic to an aesthetic lifestyle amenity."[63] Diversity becomes an asset that draws in white consumers to a given area, a source of investment and profit for residents who can stay in the neighborhood.

The racialized and classed character of hosts in this change ought not to be dismissed, doubly so for property owners who see Airbnb as a return on investment.[64] One younger Black host decried the city for prioritizing building homeless shelters and affordable housing in her neighborhood because it drove down real estate value. She argued that this kept middle-class Black families from building wealth in Anacostia. For her, Airbnb provided a welcome alternative as it allowed her to "get that investment back in real time" instead of sitting on a boarded-up property to flip to a developer or incoming resident. While it is true that Airbnb may have kept a house from being flipped, this host presents middle-class homeowners as a key constituency for economic growth that needs to stay in the neighborhood. The homeless and working poor who need affordable housing are portrayed as problematic parts of the area that lower real estate prices, rather than an alternative interpretation that saw the city attempting to help the working poor stay in Anacostia.

Though we remain in the realm of speculation until new quantitative data on Wards 7 and 8 Airbnb hosting are available, it is evident that Airbnb can potentially function as a force of gentrification in these Wards. As I have shown elsewhere, landlords in Wards 7 and 8 opted for short-term rental guests in lieu of long-term tenants in multi-unit buildings.[65] Through its potential as a force of displacement in Wards 7 and 8 and its active displacement in other Wards, the City layer allows us to understand Airbnb as one among many digital landlord platforms that enable its users to take part in racial capitalist abstraction that makes the city unaffordable and unlivable for many—a monetization that makes these processes more durable through large-scale computation.

Perhaps the layer least obviously connected to Airbnb, but most directly connected to colonial racial capitalism is the Earth layer through which the planet is mapped to create the extractive mechanisms that will satisfy the Stack's energy demand. However, this globe-spanning vision is a fundamentally colonial racial capitalist one. To create a Stack, to create manufacturing and technology, to create the conditions for this extraction, requires a colonial racial capitalist system that visions the land through the colonizer's gaze, builds on the moments of so-called primitive accumulation, and harnesses racialized labor and colonized land.

The Earth layer in DC depends on a settler relationship to land that treats land as a resource to feed its geopolitics. This imaginary places the Stack into the larger project of extraction and exploitation at the heart of colonial racial capitalism. Without settler extraction at home and other kinds of colonialism abroad, the Stack could not exist in the US. Every data center, every cell phone tower, and every fiber circuit depend on the conquest of land and the forcible extraction of its resources.

This structural relationship of colonization extends into Airbnb's platform. The AWS infrastructure used by Airbnb is powered by hundreds of Amazon data centers across the DC suburbs in Northern Virginia and Maryland. These data centers depend on massive amounts of energy fueled by coal and natural gas —"at least 2.7 GW" in the region.[66] Large data centers have been a massive drain on water resources. North Virginia, home to "70% of the world's digital information," uses about five million gallons of water a day for each data center—highly stressing nearby watersheds like the Potomac Basin.[67] Airbnb depends on the larger resource extraction across the Greater DC area and the extended Potomac River basin, of which the Anacostia River is a major tributary. This dependence will only become more entrenched as Airbnb implements water-intensive and power-intensive generative large-language models like Gameplanner.AI.[68]

The extractive relationship to water and energy extends to broader relationships to land use in DC Wards 7 and 8 are two sites where the colonial racial capitalist relationship to land and water continues to endure. The Anacostia River is a long-standing contested site between the Black and White community and place-making. As Sabiyah Prince shows, Black uses of the river were frowned upon and Black residents were often barred from using the river by elite white boat clubs.[69] Likewise, the new environmental restoration projects along the Anacostia River in Ward 7 and 8—11th Street Bridge Park and Poplar Point—became sites of "environmental colonization" as these areas were redeveloped to make way for hip cafes and policed green space meant to attract wealthier and whiter residents.[70] These new environmental restoration projects function as potential draws for Airbnb guests in the area. These former industrial areas becoming environmental tourism spots show how the User, Interface, City, Cloud, and Earth layers enact a colonial racial capitalist relationship to land and water through Airbnb as well as how the CRC Stack derives from long-standing processes of displacement and extraction.

Analyzing the layers of the Stack enables us to see how the platform acts as an infrastructural entity that enhances the durability of colonial racial capitalism. Although the platform has the potential to further anti-racist forms of placemaking, Airbnb depends on capitalist markets that drive people of color from their homes and are fueled by extractive relationships to land, water, and other non-human actors. Purely resistant agency on platforms is constrained by their entanglements with colonial racial capitalist systems.

Conclusion

In theorizing the platform-enabled durability of colonial racial capitalism, we must hold multiple forms of platform action in tandem. Though it is easy to fall into simple descriptions of Airbnb as being either harmful or helpful, a more complete

picture of the political economy of short-term rentals and their relations to space, land, and labor helps us better think through what undoing its impacts may look like. While the platform-enabled field of agency may be limited, it is not the only one available for residents and users. To undo racism requires us to extend the field of agency beyond the platform into the very constitution of our economies. Durability is not set in stone. Just as platforms may become more or less durable so may this platform-powered iteration of colonial racial capitalism.

Just as platforms have interlaced with state and markets at multiple levels of the Stack, so should our activism for just visions of housing and space. The Airbnb hosts above are drawn towards working on the platform because it provides the best navigation for economic precarity. Their contestation of platform space-making shows us that there is room to reshape how platforms act in our cities on an individual, neighborhood, and state-level. They may not completely overturn the existing economic order, but they do reveal how people can modify and upend a CRC Stack. It is taking this activist energy and redirecting it towards the multiple layers of the Stack, as hosts and guests have done with the #AirbnbWhileBlack and #StolenHomes campaigns, which is our best path forward.

Notes

1. Noah Kulwin, "Airbnb Beat Proposition F. Here's Its Game Plan for Winning Everywhere Else," *Vox*, November 4, 2015, https://www.vox.com/2015/11/4/11620358/airbnb-beat-proposition-f-heres-its-game-plan-for-winning-everywhere < https://www.vox.com/2015/11/4/11620358/airbnb-beat-proposition-f-heres-its-game-plan-for-winning-everywhere> . ↩

2. Airbnb, "The Airbnb Community Compact," *Airbnb Citizen*, https://www.airbnbcitizen.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Airbnb-Community-Compact.pdf < https://www.airbnbcitizen.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Airbnb-Community-Compact.pdf> . ↩

3. Airbnb, "The Airbnb Community Compact," 4. ↩

4. Airbnb Public Policy, "Meet Your Hosts | Airbnb Hosts in DC | Airbnb Citizen," YouTube video, 1 min., 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oP-leUHhUg8 < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oP-leUHhUg8> . ↩

5. Agustin Cocola-Gant, Angela Hof, Christian Smigiel, and Ismael Yrigoy, "Short-Term Rentals as a New Urban Frontier—Evidence from European Cities," *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 53, no. 7 (2021): 1601–8, https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X211042634.q < https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X211042634.q> .

6. Luke Yates, "Political Struggles in the Platform Economy: Understanding Platform Legitimation Tactics," in *Urban Platforms and the Future City: Transformations in Infrastructure, Governance, Knowledge and Everyday Life*, ed. M. Hodson, J. Kasmire, A. McMeekin, J. G. Stehlin, & K. Ward (Routledge, 2020); Luke Yates, *The Airbnb 'Movement' for Deregulation: How Platform-Sponsored Grassroots Lobbying is Changing Politics*, University of Manchester and Ethical Consumer Research Association, 2021, www.research.manchester.ac.uk/portal/files/192396608/Yates_2021_The_Airbnb_Movement_Corporate_Sponsored_Grassroots_Lobbying_in_the_Platform_Economy.pdf < http://www.research.manchester.ac.uk/portal/files/192396608/Yates_2021_The_Airbnb_Movement_Corporate_Sponsored_Grassroots_Lobbying_in_the_Platform_Economy.pdf> .

7. Benjamin Edelman, Michael Luca, and Dan Svirsky, "Racial Discrimination in the Sharing Economy: Evidence from a Field Experiment," *American Economic Journal. Applied Economics* 9, no. 2 (2017): 1–22, https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2701902 < https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2701902> ; Jason McCloskey, "Discriminatorybnb: A Discussion of Airbnb's Race Problem, Its New Anti-Discrimination Policies, and the Need for External Regulation," *Washington University Journal of Law and Policy* 57 (2018): 203–223, https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2059&context=law_journal_law_policy < https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2059&context=law_journal_law_policy> ; Minsu Park, Chao Yu, and Michael Macy, "Fighting Bias with Bias: How Same-Race Endorsements Reduce Racial Discrimination on Airbnb." *Science Advances* 9, no. 6 (2023): 1–7. https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.add2315 < https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.add2315> .

8. Michael Burawoy, "The Extended Case Method," *Sociological Theory* 16, no. 1 (1998): 5, https://doi.org/10.1111/0735-2751.00040g < https://doi.org/10.1111/0735-2751.00040g> .

9. Burawoy, "The Extended Case Method," 21.

10. Benjamin Bratton, *The Stack: On Software and Sovereignty* (MIT Press, 2016), 42.

11. Bratton, *Stack*, 46.

12. Bratton, *Stack*, 47–49.

13. Frieden, Rob. "The Internet Platforms and Two-Sided Markets: Implications for Competition and Consumers." *Villanova Law Review* 63, no. 2 (2018): 276.

14. Bratton, *Stack*, 6.

15. Bratton, *Stack*, 8. ↩

16. Benjamin Bratton, "The Black Stack," *e-flux Journal* 53 (2014): 4, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/53/59883/the-black-stack/ < https://www.e-flux.com/journal/53/59883/the-black-stack/> . ↩

17. Bratton, *Stack*, 374. ↩

18. Niels van Doorn, "A New Institution on the Block: On Platform Urbanism and Airbnb Citizenship," *New Media & Society* 22, no. 10 (2019): 1810, https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819884377 < https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819884377> . ↩

19. Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Duke University Press, 2006), 70. ↩

20. Dimitris Papadopoulos, Niamh Stephenson, and Vassilis Tsianos, *Escape Routes: Control and Subversion in the Twenty-First Century* (Pluto Press, 2008), 27–28. ↩

21. Bratton, *Stack*, 361. ↩

22. Bratton, *Stack*, 361. ↩

23. Neda Atanasoski and Kalindi Vora, *Surrogate Humanity: Race, Robots, and the Politics of Technological Futures* (Duke University Press, 2019), 4. ↩

24. Atanasoski and Vora, *Surrogate Humanity*, 5. ↩

25. Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 287–288, https://doi.org/10.1353/ncr.2004.0015 < https://doi.org/10.1353/ncr.2004.0015> . ↩

26. Katherine McKittrick, Frances H. O'Shaughnessy, and Witaszek Kendall, "Rhythm, or on Sylvia Wynter's Science of the Word," *American Quarterly* 70, no. 4 (2018): 867, https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2018.0069 < https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2018.0069> ; Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality," 316–17. ↩

27. Susan Koshy, Lisa Marie Cacho, Jodi A. Byrd, and Brian Jordan Jefferson, introduction to *Colonial Racial Capitalism*, ed. Susan Koshy, Lisa Marie Cacho, Jodi A. Byrd, and Brian Jordan Jefferson (Duke University Press, 2022), 6. ↩

28. Ruha Benjamin, ed., *Captivating Technology: Race, Carceral Technoscience, and Liberatory Imagination in Everyday Life* (Duke University Press, 2019); Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (NYU Press, 2018). ↩

29. Nick Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism* (Polity, 2016), 32. ↩

30. Leigh Gallagher, *The Airbnb Story: How Three Ordinary Guys Disrupted an Industry, Made Billions . . . and Created Plenty of Controversy* (Harper Business, 2017), 28. ↩

31. Gallagher, *Airbnb Story*, 41).

32. David McIntyre, Arati Srinivasan, and Asda Chintakananda, "For Platforms, Durability Is the New Strategic Imperative," *LSE Business Review*, February 15, 2021, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/businessreview/2021/02/15/for-platforms-durability-is-the-new-strategic-imperative < https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/businessreview/2021/02/15/for-platforms-durability-is-the-new-strategic-imperative/> .

33. Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 2.

34. Beth Coleman, "Everything Is Animated: Pervasive Media and the Networked Subject," *Body & Society* 18, no. 1 (2012): 86, https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034X11433488 < https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034X11433488> .

35. Iris Ofelia López, *Matters of Choice: Puerto Rican Women's Struggle for Reproductive Freedom* (Rutgers University Press, 2008).

36. Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton University Press, 2011), 23.

37. Judith Butler, "Performative Agency," *Journal of Cultural Economy* 3, no. 2 (2010): 151, https://doi.org/10.1080/17530350.2010.494117 < https://doi.org/10.1080/17530350.2010.494117> .

38. Jessica A. Grieser, *The Black Side of the River: Race, Language, and Belonging in Washington, DC* (Georgetown University Press, 2022), 16–17).

39. Tiffany E. Browne, "Pushing Through Complacency to Fight Health Disparities in DC's African American Communities," *DC Policy Center*, May 18, 2017, https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/health-disparities-in-d-c-s-african-american-communities < https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/health-disparities-in-d-c-s-african-american-communities/> .

40. Sabiyha Prince, "Washington D.G.: District of Gentrification" in *Shifting Neighborhoods: Gentrification and Cultural Displacement in American Cities*, Washington DC: National Community Reinvestment Coalition, 2019, https://ncrc.org/gentrification-dc < https://ncrc.org/gentrification-dc/> .

41. Sheyda M. Aboii, "Encounters with the Flesh of Fish: Subsistence Fishing along the Anacostia River," *Journal for the Anthropology of North America* 24, no. 2 (2021): 56–64, https://doi.org/10.1002/nad.12151 < https://doi.org/10.1002/nad.12151> ; Sabiyha Prince, *African Americans and Gentrification in Washington, DC: Race, Class and Social Justice in the Nation's Capital* (Ashgate, 2014).

42. Grieser, *Black Side of the River*, 201.

43. "Airbnb and DC's East of the River Communities," *Airbnb Citizen*, 2018, https://www.airbnbcitizen.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/REPORT_-Airbnb-and-DC%E2%80%99s-East-of-the-River-Communities-August-2018.pdf <

https://www.airbnbcitizen.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/REPORT_-Airbnb-and-D.C.%E2%80%99s-East-of-the-River-Communities-August-2018.pdf> .

44. Paula Bialski, "Home for Hire: How the sharing economy commoditises our private sphere," in *Sharing Economies in Times of Crisis: Protocols Politics and Possibilities*, ed. Anthony Ince and Sarah Marie Hal (Routledge, 2017), 87.

45. Kyle Chayka, "Welcome to Airspace: How Silicon Valley Helps Spread the Same Sterile Aesthetic Across the World," *Verge*, August 3, 2016, https://www.theverge.com/2016/8/3/12325104/airbnb-aesthetic-global-minimalism-startup-gentrification < https://www.theverge.com/2016/8/3/12325104/airbnb-aesthetic-global-minimalism-startup-gentrification> .

46. Airbnb, "Strangers Aren't Strange: Introducing Airbnb's Latest Ad Campaign," *Airbnb Newsroom*, 2021, https://news.airbnb.com/strangers-arent-strange-introducing-airbnbs-latest-ad-campaign < https://news.airbnb.com/strangers-arent-strange-introducing-airbnbs-latest-ad-campaign/> .

47. Sallie A. Marston, "The Social Construction of Scale," *Progress in Human Geography* 24, no. 2 (2000): 219–42, https://doi.org/10.1191/030913200674086272 < https://doi.org/10.1191/030913200674086272> ; Filip Stabrowski, "'People as Businesses': Airbnb and Urban Micro-Entrepreneurialism in New York City," *Cambridge Journal Of Regions, Economy and Society* 10, no. 2 (2017): 327–347, https://doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rsx004 < https://doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rsx004> .

48. Zawadi Rucks-Ahidiana, "Theorizing Gentrification as a Process of Racial Capitalism," *City & Community* 21, no. 3 (2021): 174, https://doi.org/10.1177/15356841211054790 < https://doi.org/10.1177/15356841211054790> .

49. Maartje Roelofsen and Claudio Minca, "The Superhost. Biopolitics, Home and Community in the Airbnb Dream-World of Global Hospitality," *Geoforum* 91 (2018): 170–81, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2018.02.021 < https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2018.02.021> .

50. Roelofsen and Minca, "Superhost,"177.

51. Airbnb, "How do star ratings work for stays?" *Airbnb Help Center*, accessed March 10, 2021, https://www.airbnb.com/help/article/1257/how-do-star-ratings-work-for-stays < https://www.airbnb.com/help/article/1257/how-do-star-ratings-work-for-stays> .

52. Peter Kent-Stoll, "The Racial and Colonial Dimensions of Gentrification," *Sociology Compass* 14, no. 12 (2020): 15, https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12838 < https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12838> .

53. Airbnb, "Superhost: Recognizing the Best in Hospitality," *Airbnb*, accessed March 1, 2021, https://www.airbnb.com/e/superhost < https://www.airbnb.com/e/superhost> .

54. George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Temple University Press, 2011), 28–29.

55. George Lipsitz, "Space," in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, ed. Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler (New York University Press, 2014), 229, http://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/nyupacs/space/0 < http://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/nyupacs/space/0> .

56. AWS, "Airbnb Case Study," Amazon, accessed April 21, 2023, https://aws.amazon.com/solutions/case-studies/airbnb-case-study < https://aws.amazon.com/solutions/case-studies/airbnb-case-study/> .

57. Cocola-Gant et al., "Short-Term Rentals"; Robbin Deboosere, Danielle Jane Kerrigan, David Wachsmuth, and Ahmed El-Geneidy, "Location, Location and Professionalization: A Multilevel Hedonic Analysis of Airbnb Listing Prices and Revenue," *Regional Studies, Regional Science* 6, no. 1 (2019): 143–56, https://doi.org/10.1080/21681376.2019.1592699 < https://doi.org/10.1080/21681376.2019.1592699> .

58. Jelke R. Bosma and Niels van Doorn, "The Gentrification of Airbnb: Closing Rent Gaps Through the Professionalization of Hosting," *Space and Culture* (2022): 1–17, https://doi.org/10.1177/12063312221090606 < https://doi.org/10.1177/12063312221090606> .

59. Desiree Fields and Elora Lee Raymond, "Racialized Geographies of Housing Financialization," *Progress in Human Geography* 45, no. 6 (2021): 1631, https://doi.org/10.1177/03091325211009299 < https://doi.org/10.1177/03091325211009299> .

60. Deborah Cowen and Nemoy Lewis, "Anti-Blackness And Urban Geopolitical Economy," *Society & Space* (2016): https://www.societyandspace.org/articles/anti-blackness-and-urban-geopolitical-economy < https://www.societyandspace.org/articles/anti-blackness-and-urban-geopolitical-economy> .

61. Jackie Wang, *Carceral Capitalism* (MIT Press, 2018), 88.

62. Sharon Zukin, Scarlett Lindeman, and Laurie Hurson, "The Omnivore's Neighborhood? Online Restaurant Reviews, Race, and Gentrification," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 17, no. 3 (2017): 462, https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540515611203 < https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540515611203> .

63. Brandi Thompson Summers, *Black in Place: The Spatial Aesthetics of Race in a Post-Chocolate City* (University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 89.

64. Grieser, *Black Side of the River*, 198.

65. Nina Medvedeva, "The Romantic Anti-Capitalisms of Short-Term Rental Hosting," *Antipode* 55, no. 6 (2023): 1853, https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12938 < https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12938> .

66. Ella Fanger, "The Dirty Energy Fueling Amazon's Data Gold Rush," *Nation*, February 22, 2024, https://www.thenation.com/article/environment/data-centers-virginia-amazon-

environment < https://www.thenation.com/article/environment/data-centers-virginia-amazon-environment/> .

67. Sachi Kitajima Mulkey, "The Surging Demand for Data Is Guzzling Virginia's Water," *Grist*, May 8, 2024, https://grist.org/technology/surging-demand-data-guzzling-water-ai < https://grist.org/technology/surging-demand-data-guzzling-water-ai/> ; Md Abu Bakar Siddik, Arman Shehabi, and Landon Marston, "The Environmental Footprint of Data Centers in the United States," *Environmental Research Letters* 16 (2021): 1–11, https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/abfba1/pdf < https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/abfba1/pdf> .
68. Airbnb, "Airbnb has acquired GamePlanner.AI," *Airbnb Newsroom*, 2023, https://news.airbnb.com/airbnb-has-acquired-gameplanner-ai < https://news.airbnb.com/airbnb-has-acquired-gameplanner-ai/> .
69. Prince, *African Americans and Gentrification*.
70. Isabelle Anguelovski, "The Unbearable Whiteness of Greening," *Barcelona Laboratory for Environmental Justice and Sustainability*, 2019, https://www.bcnuej.org/2019/09/02/is-gentrification-in-washington-dcs-anacostia-whitewashing-black-culture < https://www.bcnuej.org/2019/09/02/is-gentrification-in-washington-dcs-anacostia-whitewashing-black-culture/> .

Author Information

Nina Medvedeva

Nina Medvedeva is Assistant Professor of Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies at Winona State University. Medvedeva earned her PhD in Feminist Studies from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. Her project, "At Home in the Sharing Economy: An Ethnography in Boston, San Francisco, and Washington DC," draws on feminist political economy, queer of color critique, economic anthropology, urban geography, and social movement studies to analyze how short-term rentals like Airbnb reconfigure the home as central to the functions of racial capitalism. She shows how municipal debates over short-term rentals create new arrangements of urban governance and inspire new housing justice social movements. Her work has appeared in a special issue of *Feminist Studies* on feminism and capitalism, *Antipode, Real Life* magazine, and the *Platypus* blog. Medvedeva previously served as a postdoctoral fellow in Women's and Gender Studies at Hamilton College.

View all of Nina Medvedeva's articles.

Article details

Nina Medvedeva, "The Platform-Enabled Durability of Colonial Racial Capitalism in Washington DC's Wards 7 and 8," *Lateral* 14.2 (2025).

https://doi.org/10.25158/L14.2.8

This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License. Copyright is retained by authors.

Lateral is the peer-reviewed, open access journal of the Cultural Studies Association.

ISSN 2469-4053